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A Christmas Snowshoe Sketch

BY JOHN LESPERANCE.

PRICE TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

MONTREAL:
DAWSON BROTHERS.

159 TO 165 ST. JAMES STREET.

1882.

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1882.

Entered according to Act of Parliament by JOHN LESPERANCE in the office
of the Minister of Agriculture in the year 1882.

To the Old Montreal Club,

AND ALL THE OTHER SNOWSHOE CLUBS OF THE CITY,
WORTHY RIVALS OF THEIR

Magna Parens,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS DEDICATED

BY
THE AUTHOR.



TUQUE BLEUE.

A CHRISTMAS SNOWSHOE SKETCH.

I.

AT THE COLLEGE GATES.

The winter of 1872-3. There was no Vennor at that time, thank Heavens, and the weather had its own sweet way. Navigation closed punctually on the 25th November, St. Catherine's day, and the city wrapped itself up for six months' traditional isolation. Snow fell early, at the beginning of December, and by the middle of the month the landscape was clothed in all the glory of its bridal dress, and the roads were magnificent. The snowshoers were in high feather. They had a long season before them, and there were social causes at work which promised that it would prove one of exceptional enjoyment. Lord Dufferin, who had arrived in the country during the summer, had designed to spend the days of the carnival in the metropolis.

It was three o'clock of a fine Saturday afternoon, and the Montreal Club had gathered in full force at the

College Gates. Up they came from every quarter of the West End—the stalwart fellows, in their white flannel blouses, striped sashes, and cerulean bonnets, forming as handsome a body of young men as could be mustered together in America.

“I say, Rollo.”

“Yes.”

“We mustn’t stop too long at Prendergast’s to-night.”

“Why not?”

“I have an engagement.”

“Oh, you are always having engagements.”

“But this is something special, something teetotally nice.”

“Well and what of it?”

“I want you to come with me.”

“No, sir! I decidedly object. This is our first tramp over the Mountain. The boys have all turned out. There is a grand supper awaiting us at the old hostelry. We are to have no end of speeches, songs and dances. I want to have my full share of the fun. Thank you, I can’t go.”

“But such girls, Rollo.”

“Girls? What girls?”

“At the Blaines, on University street. Miss Mabel is as pretty as a picture, you know, and there is that Quebec beauty, Louisa Tardif—she’s perfectly snip-tious.”

“Laclede, you don’t mean to say you know those ladies?”

“I do, sir. Introduced last Thursday. Promised

to call again to-day, and bring a friend. You *must* come, man."

"Well, circumstances alter cases, and I'll see about it."

As he said this, Rollo Thorndyke, who, during the preceding colloquy, had been busily engaged, with one knee in the snow, lacing on his webbed sandals, shook himself like a young polar bear and looked inquisitively at his companion. The two then laughed and clasped hands.

Rollo Thorndyke was a glorious specimen of budding manhood—six feet one in his stockings, straight as a dart, with deep blue eyes, cheeks like roses, chestnut hair closely curled, the shoulders of an Atlas, legs like pillars, clean shaven withal, and not an ounce of superfluous flesh about him. He stood there, the model of the Isthmian athlete. No exaggeration, reader. The same Rollo walks the streets of Montreal to-day, a trifle older than when I thus limn him, but still in form and feature, a king of men.

Laclede Austen, was not exactly the opposite, but quite unlike, nevertheless. Of slighter build and lower stature, he had dark eyes and hair and a beautiful mouth. Although an active member of this and other clubs, he was evidently much more of an in-door man than his companion.

Their little conversation was scarcely ended, when the signal for the advance sounded, and the men fell into line. A moment later and they were all off, with that swinging gait and peculiar rolling of the hips which is characteristic of snowshoers. The march was slow enough within the city, the men reserving their

wind for the attack on the flank of the Mountain, but it was evident from their manner that they were prepared for a heavy tramp.

Nothing unusual occurred until the last street was reached, when, as the procession rounded the angle, the tinkling of silver bells was heard, and a sleigh glided rapidly by. On the back seat, from under a mountain of bearskins, peered two lovely little heads—one crowned by a jaunty seal cap, and the other framed in the folds of a purple hood. Two pairs of laughing eyes flashed like stars.

"There they are!" exclaimed Laclede, nudging his friend.

The two had just time to pull off their tuques and bow profoundly, as the sleigh darted around the corner.

"Isn't that nice?" said Laclede.

"Crackey, but it is," replied Rollo.

"Now, will you come?"

"I'll see about it," murmured Thorndyke with bated breath.

II.

AT THE PINES.

The boys took the Mountain in good style. For the first five minutes they moved lightly enough, but then the force of the declivity began to tell on them, and they settled down to a more measured tread. All things considered, however, it is a question whether the Iroquois made better time when pursued over these same slopes

by the arquebuses of Maisonneuve. At length they reached the first spur, almost in a body, there being no stragglers to speak of. Here the Captain cried "halt," and a breathing space ensued, during which the men had the opportunity of admiring the beautiful panorama spread out before them. Directly at their feet lay the white city, with its multitudinous towers and steeples gleaming in the pale sunlight; beyond, the frozen belt of the St. Lawrence, and far on the edge of the horizon, the grey outlines of Rouville and Rougemont standing like wardens over the chained waters of the Richelieu and Yamaska.

A tightening of shoes, a bracing of sashes, and the men were ready for the further word of command. It came loud, and clear:— "To the Pines!"

There was an immense simultaneous rush, shoulder striking shoulder, and the snow was thrown up like spray, as the fellows made off in a spurt over the broad plateau. For a while they all kept well together, but gradually science, speed and stamen made a break in the solid body, forming a long straggling line, with intervals of daylight, between. Some fell, others broke a shoe, others slackened their pace, and others stopped short to catch their wind. A good half kept right on, and at their head were two who seemed to be running neck and neck. The taller man was a little in advance, however, when at length The Pines were reached. The twain were Rollo and Laclede.

Here there was a halt of ten minutes. While the stragglers came in, "pocket pistols" were produced, pipes were lit, and the hills reverberated the shouts

and laughter of the men. Our two friends sat apart together on the fallen trunk of a tamarac. Laclede had seemingly the talk wholly to himself, and as it was all about the late *rencontre*, it will be no indiscretion to creep up and listen to him. This will save the writer the trouble of describing, in his own language, the two heroines of our story.

"Miss Mabel is a blonde, isn't she?" queried Rollo.

"Of the purest type. Blue eyes, golden hair rolling in waves like taffy, lips like Cupid's bow, neck like an alabaster column, arms—well my dear fellow, I'm stuck there, and only wish we had Ouida with us to depict her more fully. Anyhow, she is Goethe's Marguerite over again."

"Oh, I hope not," said Rollo, with a groan.

"In style and appearance, I mean."

"Well, that will do for Miss Mabel. Now, what about Miss Louise?"

"Pshaw! I am sure to make a mess of her."

"She is a brunette, to begin with, isn't she? I saw that much from her roguish black eyes, a moment since. Besides, we must have a contrast, you know."

"Aye, Rollo, and such a brunette!"

"Dark hair, of course?"

"Black as the raven's wing."

"Dark complexion?"

"Nonsense, man. Cream-white, flecked with the bloom of peaches."

"Yum, yum," muttered Rollo, amused at his friend's enthusiasm. "Plump? All these French girls are."

"Plump as a partridge."

"Sharp?"

"Sharp as a weasel."

"Sweet?"

"Sweet as ho——"

"Attention!" shouted the Captain, in a voice that rang like Ernani's magic horn.

Laclede was startled, and he left the soft word unsaid.

Rollo laughed heartily.

"That'll do, old man. You're pretty badly off," said he.

"Never mind that. Will you come with me?"

"I'll see about it," Rollo replied hurriedly, as he caught the Captain's signal and started off for the finish.

When they reached the high road at the end of the tramp, and were about to cross leisurely over to Prendergast's, the same sleigh, with the same occupants, passed by at a lively trot. There were the same interchange of glances, the same salutations, and the lovely vision again disappeared.

"Will you come with me?" asked the persistent Laclede.

"Yes, by thunder, I will," roared the young giant, and his eyes glared like steel.

III.

AT PRENDERGAST'S.

The royal feasts of other days! I am afraid that they have sadly degenerated since, but eight years ago they were among the institutions of our sporting world. What a roar and crush in the saloon below, to begin with. Everybody recounting his adventures, detailing the ludicrous and exciting incidents of the tramp, or a few of the happier ones chaffing others over their little discomfitures. What a flow of animal—and artificial spirits! What thorough good nature! What healthy manliness amid occasional rough displays!

Then the supper up-stairs. Four long narrow tables of deal, parallel to the walls, laden with solids that might make even Gargantua groan—ranks of cold fowl, pyramids of headcheese, coils of sausage, mountains of bread, oceans of cider. And such appetites! Keen as the gales that toss the plumage of The Pines.

This evening in question, there was special enjoyment, because, as has been said, a grand season was just opened and the Club was looking forward to it with eager scent. There was the initial speech by the Captain, laying down the programme of the winter's campaign, and a rolling fire of toasts and responses followed for upward of an hour. Then, at the suggestion of the younger fellows, who could not speak themselves and were getting tired of hearing others, the party returned to the parlor below for dances and music. The main incident of this part of the evening

was the production of a new snowshoe song, announced with due solemnity by the Captain. A nice little man sat down at the piano, a robust tenor stood beside the treble keys, and between them they gave to the world the following rattler :—

Chilliest of skies above,
 Coldest of fields below,
 Bound to the shoe we love,
 Ever and on we go ;
 Far as the eye can peer,
 Where the goal of the Mountain shines,
 Our forward course we steer,
 Up to the feathered Pines ;
 Tramp, tramp, tramp,
 Vive la Tuque Bleue.

What if the tempest roars,
 What if the wild winds blow ;
 Our buoyant spirit soars
 Over the steppes of snow ;
 Swift as the antlered deer,
 Light as the soft gazelle,
 The hedge and the wall we clear,
 And the gorge that we know so well ;
 Tramp, tramp, tramp,
 Vive la Tuque Bleue.

The crescent moon glows bright,
 Like Ali's scimitar,
 And the plain reflects the light
 Of the golden evening star,
 While with shout and laughter and song,
 And the beat of our measured pace,
 We skirt the meadows along,
 Or join in the champion race ;
 Tramp, tramp, tramp,
 Vive la Tuque Bleue.

Back from the lofty hills,
 When the work of the day is done,
 Back from the frozen rills,
 When the doughty game is won;
 'Neath beauty's smile we stand,
 And bow to beauty's eyes,
 And receive from beauty's hand
 The victor's jewelled prize;
 Tramp, tramp, tramp,
 Vive la Tuque Bleue!

There was a tremendous burst of applause, *obbligato*.
 Then the universal cry arose:

"Author, author!"

A blushing and innocent-looking youth made his appearance, whereat there were cat-calls, explosions of horse-play, and volleys of Kentish fire.

"Why, it is only a reporter!" was the exclamation, accompanied by shouts of laughter.

Yes, "only a reporter," a picker up of unconsidered trifles and wisps of news along the sidewalks during the day—but when his work is over, a poet, a musician, an orator and one of the best runners in the Club. In a word—a universal favorite.

"Bully boy!" and they tossed him up to the ceiling three several times receiving him tenderly in their arms as he came down. Rollo was foremost in all this amusement, and about leading another rumpus, when Laclede, who had stood watching the shadows of evening as they gathered over the hills, plucked his sleeve and muttered:

"Won't you come now?"

Rollo collected his senses for a moment, looked intently at his friend and replied in decided tones :

" Well yes, let us go."

And they went.

IV.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

It was after tea, and the two girls were alone in the cosy little parlor. A soft light fell from the central gasalier, a bright fire glowed in the grate, and the warm tints of the hangings infused an air of comfort into the whole apartment. Louise Tardif was seated before the piano, her fingers wandering aimlessly over the keys, while her mind was evidently far away. DeZouche and Shaw would like to have me tell whether this beautiful instrument was a Weber or a Decker, but they can't come it, as my story breathes peace, not war. Mabel Blaine lay half buried in the plush recesses of an arm-chair, listlessly turning the leaves of an album of engravings. The portraits given of them, by Laclede, in a preceding chapter, were not a bit flattered. They were both very pretty and the marked contrast between the types brought the distinctive charms of each into higher relief.

The hour of night tinkled from the ormolu French clock on the mantel. Louise wheeled half round on the stool, and Mabel looked up. It was clear that both had the same thought.

" It is getting late, " said one.

"I am tired waiting," said the other.

Just then, the wire of the door-bell vibrated, there was a shuffling of feet in the hall, and the drawing-room was opened. The ceremony of introduction was soon performed. After a few conventional words were interchanged, it was not long before the four young people were engaged in lively and pleasant conversation. They were a curious group, forming quite a study for an artist. The stalwart Rollo seated by the stately Mabel, with her full lines of face and form, seemed to have just that complement required to bring out all his manly beauty, but the effect was still more striking when he approached the dark and *petite* Louise. She was so sprightly too in all her words and actions, that she brought the whole man's being into play. It must not be inferred, however, that Rollo so absorbed the attention of the girls as to throw his friend into the background. Laclede was able to take care of himself always, and while lacking the physical advantages of his rival, was a very brilliant, jolly fellow, quite at home in a drawing-room. In this instance, he had a slight advantage over Rollo in that he could speak French like a native, thus catching charming glimpses of Louise's character, when she chose to express herself for a few moments, in her own language. Yet he distributed his favors with commendable impartiality. To Mabel, as the hostess to whom he had been first introduced, and who had allowed him to be accompanied by a friend, he was very attentive indeed, and it required no particular shrewdness to detect that the latter cordially reciprocated his politeness.

The evening passed pleasantly and profitably, being taken up with quite other topics than the ordinary commonplaces of social prattle. These four young people were able to understand and appreciate each other, and the mutual attraction led to an interchange of ideas calculated to enhance their respect and esteem. It was, therefore, with universal regret that the warning voice of the French clock was heard striking eleven.

"It cannot be," exclaimed the two girls.

The two men looked at their watches and replied, "Alas! it is too true."

All four stood in the middle of the room, repeating a number of compliments and recommendations before parting. The gentlemen must be sure to call again and often. Of course they would—only too happy. The winter was going to be a brilliant one and they would enjoy it together. And snowshoeing! Did the ladies like that? Oh, they both adored it.

"Louise here is a terror on *raquettes*," said Mabel with a hearty laugh.

Very well then. They would go out together. They would attend the games and races. And if either Rollo or Laclede should happen to be winner,

"Such things might occur, you know," said the giant, with a modest bow,

They would have the ladies to crown them. Yes, it would be so nice. Well, good-night, good-night. *Bon soir! Au revoir!*

When the door closed upon them, and they found themselves in the dark night, the two friends buttoned up their great coats, and walked along for a while in

silence, which Laclede was the first to break with the monosyllable :—

" Well ? "

Rollo was equally curt in his reply.

" Very well ! "

And without further comment, the twain went straight to their rooms. Happy dogs !

The girls were more effusive. They settled themselves on low stools before the fire, and discussed the situation for a whole hour, talking both together and interspersing their discourse with a succession of exclamations and little shrieks. They went over the whole thing again after retiring to their room. What did the girls say ? Now reader, that won't do ; you will find it all out soon enough. Suffice it to add that they lay down to pleasant dreams, and that Louise, in especial, had beautiful visions of a *tuque bleue*.

V.

TUQUE BLEUE.

It is no use trying to stop young people when they get started on the flowery path of love. They will put on innocent airs and try to make you believe that there is nothing the matter. They will even attempt the hopeless task of persuading themselves that they are " all right," and bound to remain fancy free. But it is of no use. The law is inexorable. They cannot help it. They must submit and there's an end of it. Should Laclede and Rollo be exceptions ? And would it be fair to have such beauties as Mabel and Louise escape the yoke of roses ? Certainly not, and this sim-

plifies our task immensely. We have only to state the plain fact that, from the first, this precious quartet were all in love. How that love was distributed is another question which the sequel alone will reveal.

It was still early December and the snow kept falling. The consequence was that the Club was out nearly every day, making short courses around the Mountain, or long tramps across the country, as time and opportunity permitted. It was this winter, too, that several young Clubs sprang from the parent stock, forming the nucleus of many associations which have since won rare laurels on the snowy field and almost eclipsed the glory of the old Montreal. Rollo and Laclede belonged to that privileged class of mortals, who have little to do and do it well—with office hours from ten till three, after which time they were at liberty to do as they liked. Almost every other day, they would call upon Mabel and Louise, who, putting on their miniature snowshoes, would follow their chaperones with grace and endurance. Mabel was a novice who had to learn the art of walking, but she soon became an adept therein. Louisa had traversed the whole of the Quebec country on snowshoes from her earliest years, and was both fleet and steady, up hill and down dale. She used to trick herself out in a costume borrowed from the young squaws of Little Lorette—beaded moccasins, chamois leggings, striped petticoat, beaded shawl crossed over the breast, and a hood. As she came up the road, balancing herself on her little shoes, with rosy lips apart and dark eyes glancing, she looked the living picture of Minnehaha.

One afternoon, about the middle of the month, Laclede and Rollo, after following the Club in the usual march over the Mountain, broke off about half way and took a short cut home. After stopping at Lumpkins' for a glass of lemonade (!) they were preparing to resume their journey, when they descried two figures going in the direction of the second or "Little Mountain," as it is called. Without exactly knowing why, they followed in the same course, instead of going on the Cote-des-Neiges road, as they had intended to do. They took no notice of the parties at first, but on gradually approaching, observed that one was a tall, well-developed young woman, who moved along steadily. Her companion was a jaunty little fellow, clad in the uniform of the Montreal Club. And such a dapper little fellow as he was altogether! The way he paddled on his shoes was a caution, and his tiny tuque was dashed saucily on his head. Instinctively the two friends followed faster, until they came almost within hailing distance.

"I wonder who they are?" asked Laclede in a low voice.

Rollo was abstracted and did not reply.

"I know no such fellow in the Club," continued Laclede.

Still Rollo did not answer, except for a suppressed chuckle.

They moved along a little further, always approaching. Finally, at a turn of the road the young lady looked back over her shoulder, uttered a scream, and pulling her companion by the sleeve, darted off from the highway, at right angles across the fields. This

movement of theirs was accompanied by a peal of silvery laughter.

Laugh followed laugh. Rollo's sounded as an Indian whoop, and he dashed forward like an Uncas on the war-path. Laclède, hardly recovering from his stupefaction, pressed on in his tracks. Then there was a race, as erst in the Garden of the Hesperides. The pursued spurted; so did the pursuers. The former dodged; the latter dodged. The first turned to the right, then to the left; the second turned also to the right and left. At length the girl and her companion plunged into a snow bank, and stuck there. Their followers made a mighty jump, coming up full upon them.

"We are caught. We surrender," gasped the victims.

Explanations followed. The girls would not admit that they had been on a lark. Oh, no! It was only a tramp. Neither had they expected to meet the boys. They had chosen the Mountain for the scene of their operations, because Louise desired to try her new costume comparatively unobserved.

"Doesn't it become her?" asked Mabel.

"Charmingly," replied the friends, in unison.

Louise did not blush, but her cunning eyes sparkled.

Rollo and Laclède took the explanations for what they were worth, professing, of course, to believe them implicitly.

"But the beautiful tuque, mademoiselle?" said Rollo.

Louise took it off and passed it around. The cap was

of blue silk, deftly quilted, and embroidered at the base, and the tassel was just too exquisite.

"As a condition of your surrender," continued Rollo, "I stipulate that whichever of us, Laclede or I, comes in winner at our next steeplechase, shall have that tuque."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Louise.

The four then set out for home in happiest mood. There is no need to add that this little incident went a tremendous way toward acquainting these young people more intimately with one another.

VI.

THE MIDNIGHT MASS.

The reader has doubtless understood that Louise Tardif was the guest of Mabel Blaine. They were old friends and schoolmates, and there was even some relationship existing between the families. Louise had come to spend the winter in Montreal, and of course there was to be no break in the Christmas holidays. She was not to be allowed to go to Quebec, for a short time, even at New Year. This suited Mabel exactly, and was no less satisfactory to our two young clubmen. All of them resolved to make the most of their opportunities, and the Day of Days was at hand to furnish them the rarest of chances.

With Protestants, Christmas is a family and social festival, while with Catholics it is mainly religious. With Louise in their house, the Blaines could blend the two functions, and thus make their Christmas an enjoyable one indeed. Rollo and Laclede were called in to be consulted on the subject.

"You will all come with me to midnight mass," said Louise. "That will open the programme nicely. Beautiful music, grand illumination, miniature manger, song of the shepherds and other poetic attractions. As a mere spectacular exhibition, you will be pleased with it."

Everybody was agreeable.

Mabel then said :

"Very well, Louise, we will go with you to the midnight mass, and to morrow you will stand with me under the mistletoe."

"All right!" exclaimed Louise, laughing.

She was one of those jolly, sensible girls that are equal to any emergency and ready to take fun out of everything. A sly little monkey, too, that suspected there were certain magic influences in the fabled sprigs of the mistletoe.

Boom! went the great *bourdon* of Notre-Dame announcing the jubilant tidings of the Saviour's nativity—an echo of that song which once the shepherds heard on the illuminated plains of Bethlehem. It was the summons to the midnight mass. The idea of this midnight mass is a pretty one, derived from the simple piety of mediæval times, and intended to commemorate the solemn hour when the Messiah came into the world. Then, it is believed, nature performs the prodigy of recognizing, in her dumb, grand way, the fact of the Nativity. The kine in their enclosures, the sheep in the fields, even the untamed beasts in their rocky lairs or in the wildwood, bend the knee at exactly the hour of twelve to adore the new born Master of the world, even as the ox and the ass had

knelt in the cavern at Bethlehem, when the maid-mother "brought forth her first-born child and laid him in a manger." And, on nights like this, in Southern climes, the stars are said to shine more softly and, not in imagination, but in very truth, heavenly echoes are heard in the valleys, as if the angels were come back to sing the old song of gladness—*Gloria in altissimis Deo!*

At midnight mass, the temple is lighted from the apex of the dome. Flashing for a great distance through the exterior darkness, many of the pious pilgrims, who hie thitherward, exclaim in transport, like the Eastern seers:

"It is the Star of Bethlehem!"

The service was conducted with extraordinary solemnity. The altar was illuminated and bedecked with dazzling ornaments, the vestments of the pastor gleamed, and on the edge of the Communion stair arose a huge *pain bénit*, in pyramidal glory and surrounded by little flags. The custom of blessing and distributing bread at service is a commemoration of the *agape* of the primitive Christians, once universal in Europe. At this service, too, is sung the *Adeste Fideles*, the appropriate hymn of the season, ever old and ever new in its pathetic simplicity, but in our day sadly vulgarized by being made a funeral march in the British army and a drinking song among German students. In a side chapel lay the *Enfant Jésus*. This was a rude representation of the stable of Bethlehem, in which stood a manger filled with straw, and the new born Saviour extended upon it. The Virgin Mother knelt in adoration beside the child, while in the

background Joseph tended the kine, whose breath was the sole warmth of the naked babe. Beside the crib there was an urn, in which the faithful were invited to drop a few pennies for the relief of helpless infants.

Our whole party were affected deeply by the ceremony at Notre-Dame, and all expressed their satisfaction at having witnessed what was to them a decided novelty. The young men had an additional motive of wonder and pleasure in the behaviour of Louise throughout the exercises. She assisted at them with profound devotion and recollection, remaining on her knees almost the whole time and frequently engaging in prayer. The circumstance disclosed a spiritual side of her nature for which her admirers were not prepared.

"That's the right kind of a girl," thought Laclede. "She knows when to be serious as well as when to be gay. She is evidently sincere in her religious convictions, and I like her for it."

On the return to the house about two o'clock in the morning, there was a luncheon in waiting, at which Louise was asked to preside. The French call it *réveillon*. When this had been duly honored, the two cavaliers retired with a promise to return in the evening to close the day's festivities. Rollo was more than usually impressed by all that he had seen and done, and when at the outer door he had Louise all to himself for a moment, he pressed her hand and put it gently to his lips, murmuring with Hamlet:—

"Nymph, in thy orisons, be all my sins remembered!"

Don't laugh at poor Rollo, boys. It is clear that he was pretty far gone.

VII.

UNDER THE MISTLETOE.

How far Louise also was gone it is not necessary just at present to enquire. It is certain, however, that she was not indifferent to Rollo from the first. Neither was Mabel. A woman of such opulent charms, as the latter, seemed specially destined for a man of Rollo's exuberant nature and noble beauty. What a magnificent couple they would make! Practically, therefore, Thorndyke found himself between two fires, and had a most difficult selection to make. Either prize was his for the asking. Yet, which would he prefer? And Laclede! There is no doubt that Louise was his first choice. Strong mental and physical affinities existed between them, yet he was not blind to the splendid attributes of Mabel Blaine. The fact is that both the young men were in a daze, which was the more intense that their present experience was of not more than three weeks' duration. The heart can travel far, however, in that time, and may take steps that are irrevocable.

Without consulting each other, both felt that this solemn Christmas day was to prove a decisive date in their lives. Rollo would naturally go first, but Laclede did not demean himself into any such condition of inferiority as to feel that he would have perforce to content himself with the alternative which his friend would leave behind him. Both girls were more than worthy of him, and he would be proud to possess the love of either. Sensible fellow, this Laclede, with just

the proper estimation of female excellence. Such a man cannot go far wrong and deserves to be well mated.

There was a brilliant party at the Blaines on that Christmas night. The drawing-room was transformed into a bower, the pillars and dome of which were of evergreens, while festoons of rich flowers broke the verdant monotony. The curtains dividing the two parlors were drawn back, and an immense bell of exotics hung in their place. Under this were disposed the sprigs of mistletoe. Nothing would be more pleasant than to describe in detail the incidents of this party, but the limits of a short story will allow of only one or two particulars.

The other young men present were not slow to discover that Rollo and Laclede were the bright particular stars of the evening. For some of them—old frequenters of the house—this was a genuine surprise, while others took it as a matter of course, readily admitting the superior claims of the favorites.

"The only thing that remains to be discovered," said a philosophic old bachelor, "is how the ladies are going to divide the men between them. I stand by the color line."

"How do you mean?" inquired a neighbor.

"That the dark will go with the dark, and the blonde with the blonde."

"That's not so certain," remarked a gay Benedict. "I know it was not my case, and I've never had cause to regret it."

Whether these inquisitive guests got any satisfaction or not, it is certain that the parties more intimately

concerned made a long step toward settlement that night. When Mabel stood under the mistletoe, she looked superb and with an air of rapture that even her closest friends had never seen before. She appeared like Norma, the Druid priestess, and when Laclede approached to pay his homage, he felt a glance from her grand eyes pass through him whose influence was overwhelming. Not a word was exchanged, and the usual by-play followed, so that the whole episode might have evaporated had it lain simply on the surface. Under the same boughs Louise was bewitching, lithe and willowy as Undine, brimful of mischief, and going through the whole pantomime with admirable spirit. But it was of no use and her hour came at last. When Rollo bore down upon her, all her wriggling and dodging were of no avail. He caught her in his big arms and gave her a smack that resounded through the whole room, drowning her screams. Escaping at last, and stroking back her disordered hair, she tried to look surprised and resentful. But the attempt was an egregious failure. A soft smile played upon the thin lips, and under the fringes of those silken lids, there glowed a fire as mellow as is the violet of sunset skies.

When the two parted that night, the girl placed a small parcel in Rollo's hands, with instructions not to open it till he reached home. When he did open it, he found within a blue silk smoking cap, an exact counterpart of the bonnet which she wore on her tramp over the Mountain.

"Use this in the meantime," she said in a note. "If you win the race, you will have my own."

Rollo put the cap on his curly head, looked at himself in the glass and smiled very significantly. Then he further celebrated the event by producing the best of his Golden Eagles, and lighting one. As he leaned on the edge of a console, and blew an azure ring up to the ceiling, he murmured :—

“Yes, I will win the race, and win not only your bonnet, but yourself, my honey.”

VIII.

THE SWEEPSTAKES.

Rollo was as good as his word. On the 15th of the following January, the Montreal Club held its annual sweepstakes over the old route, from the head of University street, over the Mountain, and coming out at Prendergast's. There was a keen competition that year, owing to the large number of entries, and the well known points of several of the contestants. Among them, of course, was Laclede, accounted one of the best runners in the Club.

On the day of the battle, the two friends had a talk together about it.

“I am going to win that race or burst a blood vessel,” said Rollo.

“I'll give you a tussle,” replied Laclede, in his quiet, good-natured way.

“Oh you're after the Tuque Bleue too, are you?”

“Why, certainly. It's worth gaining.”

“That's all right, old fellow. Next to myself, there's

no man I'd rather see win than you. In other circumstances I should even rather see you ahead of me."

Rollo looked straight at his friend, as he pronounced these last words. Laclede evidently understood their bearing, for he laughed and wished his rival good luck. These two men were worthy of each other.

There was an immense crowd at the finishing point, the broad road around and in front of Prendergast's being encumbered with sleighs. Men, women and children were present and the excitement was that which alone is exhibited at some great field day in the old sporting countries. Speculation was rife as to the probable winners, heavy stakes being laid upon the favorites. At length, a great shout arose from the outrunners, who had gone forth in the open to catch a first glimpse of the racers as they emerged from the trees around the point.

"Here they are. Clear the track!"

And there they were indeed, a dozen of them pretty well together, and tearing over the fields with all the skill and fire of thoroughbreds. The last hundred yards are reached. This is the supreme moment of victory. The man that spurts best now is winner of the race.

Another thundering clamor is heard.

"Thorndyke and Austen have the lead."

And so they had. Up they came like a whirlwind, leaving all the others behind.

"Thorndyke is ahead!"

"Austen is ahead!"

A pause, during which the vast crowd held its breath.

Then again :—

"Thorndyke, Austen !"

"Austen, Thorndyke !"

The excitement was intense. The champions were side by side, without an inch between them, and it seemed to be a tie, when suddenly, within three yards of the goal, Austen turned sharply aside and fell in his tracks. A cry of distress was heard.

"Is the man hurt?" was the general inquiry.

No, he had only broken a shoe. The boys took him up on their shoulders and bore him in triumph to the hotel. The first that came up to shake hands with him was his friend Thorndyke.

"Too bad, old boy. You might have won."

"Providential, man. I'm quite satisfied."

"But the Tuque Bleue !"

"Never you mind. That will be all right."

And it proved such. When the two had taken a little rest, and got through receiving the congratulations of their friends, they went out together some little distance from the outer edge of the crowd, where they knew a sleigh was in waiting for them. When they reached it, they were acclaimed by the clapping of snowy hands and a profusion of words of praise.

"And now for the prize," said Louise.

"I hardly dare to accept it, as I won it merely by accident," Rollo replied.

"Oh, but you must take it."

And the dainty bonnet was placed in his hands.

"I ought to give you half of this, Laclede."

"Not at all," said Mabel, laughing. "Mr. Austen has his own."

Saying which she presented Laclede with an exact fac-simile of the Tuque Bleue.

"We knew you would both be first," added Mabel, "and made due preparation to reward you both."

"This was said with such exquisite grace that Rollo caught himself wishing that he had been the victim of an accident instead of his friend.

IX.

THE TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION.

By far the most magnificent and picturesque event in the sporting annals of this country was the torchlight procession held in honor of the Governor-General, Lord Dufferin, and his beautiful Countess, late in the winter of 1873. No one who witnessed the gorgeous spectacle will ever forget it, and we shall hope in vain for its repetition. The scene at the College Gates, before the start, was one long to be remembered, and every incident thereafter, to the very end of the evening, was carried out with the most successful effect.

After inspecting the boys, in front of the University, His Lordship drove around the foot of the Mountain, by way of the Mile End, so as to enjoy a distant view of the illumination. He was followed by an endless file of sleighs, containing the beauty and the worth of the city. In one of these was the Blaine family, and,

of course, Mabel was accompanied by Louise. They could not contain their rapture as they saw the long serpentine line of torches, first moving up the steep side of the Mountain, then attaining the summit; now running forward in a succession of fiery brands, then moving slow and drawing over the sky a curtain of orange light. The scene reminded them of Sicilian troopers scaling the flanks of Aetna in full eruption, and seeking the lava caverns in quest of beauty and booty. The varied effects of light and shade, as the torches glanced behind the trees, or dipped into the hollows of the road, were extraordinary, and glorious were the bursts of reflection on the opalescent banks of snow.

At length the trysting place, the beautiful cottage of Thornbury, was reached, and its hospitable portals were thrown open to the Earl and his snowshoe guests. The evening that was spent there will ever remain memorable. It was Lord Dufferin's introduction to the youth of the city, and the beginning of that encouragement of all our field sports which was one of the most pleasing features of his successful administration.

It goes without saying that among the conspicuous members of the Montreal Club, who took a leading part in the demonstration, were the two heroes of this story. Not only had they the honor of a special introduction to the Earl and Countess, as the winners of the annual sweepstakes, but they were further privileged to present their friends, Louise, Mabel and Mrs. Blaine, the mother.

As the cottage was very crowded, and the night quite calm and mild, our young friends improved the opportunity to stroll about the grounds, illuminated a *giorno* by Chinese lanterns that hung from the branches of the cedars. At first they moved along in a body, but after a while, detached into groups, Laclede accompanying Mabel, and Louise being escorted by Rollo. It was just the night for plays of fancy, and for thoughts of love. Under that balmy sky, beneath those softly twinkling stars, amid this quietude of nature, heart leaped to heart, words of tenderness were spoken, there were thrilling pressures of the hand, and—if the truth must be told—there was the seal of sacred promise imprinted upon lips that had never met before. O youth, and beauty and love! Well, well, there is no use talking. Many of us have had our turn, many others will have theirs. Mabel and Louise, Rollo and Laclede are having theirs this night. And may the planets that course above them, bring a special benison in their train.

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The eventful winter passed. Spring with its breezes and its flowers followed, and there were faint odors of orange bloom wafted unto me. Then came a glorious July morning. Was it a dream that I heard at dawn the ringing of wedding bells? Next, from my rural retreat, I heard vague rumors of a double wedding trip to Europe.

Finally, the winter returned and once more we had the poetic midnight mass. In the same pew which

they occupied last year, knelt a big man and a little woman. Next day, I called on a little man and a large fine woman. The next day again, I was invited to a family tea, and spent a quiet evening with Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke, and Mr. and Mrs. Austen, at the house of the latter. In the smoking-room, my two friends went over the whole history which I have recited above, laughing, chaffing and very happy. In token of which they both wore their blue silk bonnets.

VIVE LA TUQUE BLEUE!

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